

Fulton County Gospel News

Good News About Christ And His Church For All Of The World

“... Christ is the head of the church: and He is the Savior of the body.” - Ephesians 5:23

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IS MY BAPTISM VALID?

Part One

by Lee Moses

Baptism is glorious, baptism is beautiful, and baptism is crucial. Why? Because God says it is! Baptism is the point at which one enters into the church of Christ (Acts 2:41, 47; compare with John 3:5), the death of Christ (Romans 6:3-4), Christ Himself (Romans 6:3; Galatians 3:27), the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16), freedom from sin (Romans 6:4, 7, 17-18), and salvation (Mark 16:16; 1 Peter 3:21). Because baptism is the point at which one enters into Christ, it is the point at which one enters the location of “*all spiritual blessings*” (Ephesians 1:3, emphasis added). Truly it is difficult to overstate the glory, beauty, and importance of baptism.

Yet not all baptisms are valid. As one considers today’s religious landscape, he sees numerous “baptisms” being administered by different religious bodies. Some immerse, others sprinkle or pour; some consider infants appropriate candidates for baptism, while others limit baptism to adults; some baptize as an outward sign of salvation that has already taken place, while others baptize for the purpose of obtaining salvation. But God only recognizes “*one baptism*” (Ephesians 4:5). Just as there is only one true God (v. 6), there is only one true baptism.

The one true baptism is that

which is commanded in the New Testament. Paul wrote, “... *Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water **by the word***” (Ephesians 5:26, emphasis added). Those in the church are sanctified, or set apart for God, and cleansed from their sins because their baptism is according to the teaching of the Holy Spirit in God’s word (John 3:5; James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:22-23). As one asks the crucial question, “Is my baptism valid?” he must turn to the New Testament to find the correct answer. And in turn, the New Testament provides the following questions one should ask himself to determine if his baptism is valid in God’s eyes.

1. Was my baptism immersion?

There have been questions raised and debates held regarding the correct “mode” of baptism. Some people aver that they baptize someone when they merely pour or sprinkle water on that person. However, the word for “baptize” (Greek *baptizoo*) means literally, “dip, immerse.”¹ God’s word describes baptism as a burial: “*Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead*” (Colossians 2:12; see also Romans 6:4). It would certainly be

a less than adequate burial that would sprinkle or pour a cupful of dirt upon a deceased person’s body; truly it would be no burial at all. And truly it is no baptism at all that fails to immerse its recipient.

2. Was my baptism in water?

As the Ethiopian eunuch traveled in his chariot, listening to Philip the evangelist “preach Christ,” “*They came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?*” (Acts 8:36). Indeed the fact that there was water made baptism possible, an opportunity seized on that occasion as “*they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him*” (v. 38). The word for “baptize” generally refers to immersion **in water**, unless a figurative use is specifically stated.² Although Jesus administered Holy Spirit baptism to some, He commanded only water baptism (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:16; John 3:5). Baptism is said to be “*the like figure*” of Noah’s salvation through the flood, “*wherein eight souls were saved **by water***” (1 Peter 3:20-31). Regarding the household of Cornelius, Peter asked, “*Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord*” (Acts 10:47-48). The “*one baptism*” of Ephesians 4:5 is clearly water baptism.

3. Was my baptism administered by another person?

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The Scriptures never speak of baptism as an act one does by or for himself. One must **“be baptized”** (Acts 2:38; 8:12, 36; 10:47-48; 18:8; 19:5; 22:16; Romans 6:3; Galatians 3:27; et al.). When the Ethiopian eunuch desired baptism, Philip accompanied him into the water that the baptism might be Scripturally accomplished (Acts 8:38). There are no particular qualifications for an administrator of baptism – certainly the effectiveness of one’s baptism can only be dependent upon **his own** faith and intentions. But one must have his baptism administered by another person for his baptism to be valid.

4. Did I complete the necessary prerequisites?

As previously mentioned, baptism is the point at which one enters into Christ (Romans 6:3; Galatians 3:27), and therefore into the place where all spiritual

blessings are located (Ephesians 1:3). However, there are other prerequisites that must be met before one can successfully enter into this location of blessedness.

Before one can be baptized Scripturally, he must be taught by the Scriptures and not by error (compare with 1 Peter 1:22-23). And before one can meet the prerequisite of belief, or faith (see below), he must be taught by the Scriptures: *“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”* (Romans 10:17).

One must believe in Christ before he can be Scripturally baptized. Jesus said, *“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned”* (Mark 16:16). The conjunction “and” demonstrates that there are at least two acts that must take place prior to salvation, and belief is every bit as crucial as baptism. In a way it is **more** crucial, because belief precedes baptism, and leads to one’s appreciating the need and having the desire to be baptized. One must believe in Christ before he can obtain the “power” or “right” to become a child of God (John 1:12), a right which one exercises at baptism (Galatians 3:26-27).

One must repent of sin before he can be Scripturally baptized. When the sinners gathered in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost asked the apostles, *“Men and brethren, what shall we do?”* (Acts 2:37); Peter responded, *“Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost”* (v. 38). Again, there are two acts spoken of as taking place prior to receiving the remission of sins and the Holy Spirit’s gift. Repentance

has to precede baptism for it to be Scriptural; for, as the Lord said, *“Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish”* (Luke 13:3).

One must confess Christ before he can be Scripturally baptized. Confession of Jesus Christ as the Son of God is said to precede salvation (Romans 10:9-10; compare with John 12:42-43; Acts 8:37; 1 Timothy 6:12); and therefore, this good confession also precedes baptism.

[To be continued next month]

¹ F. Wilbur Gingrich, *Shorter Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969 printing), p. 35.

² “(‘To baptize’) means technically ‘to baptize in water.’ Hence it is unnecessary to specify a medium.” Oepke, *“Baptoo, baptizoo,”* in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999 printing), 1:539; See also Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Univ. Of Chicago Press, 2000), pp. 164-167.

“WE CANNOT UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE ALIKE”

by Marvin L. Weir

How many times have you heard someone make a statement similar to the one above? Think about it! The Bible is God’s revelation to **all** people. God did not intend for some people to understand the Bible and other people to misunderstand it. The apostle Paul identifies one of man’s greatest problems in saying,

*“And for this cause we also thank God without ceasing, that, when ye received from us the word of the message, even the word of God, ye **accepted it** not as the word of men, but, **as it is in truth**, the word of God, which also worketh in you that believe”* (1 Thessalonians 2:13, American Standard Version, emphasis added).

People can improve their understanding in Biblical matters if they so desire. In fact, a burning desire to know the will of God is the key that will unlock the Bible’s spiritual treasure chest. One’s attitude must be that he **desires** to **submit** to the Father’s will in **all** areas. So many people today seek to please God only if it pleases them! If it pleases them to sing religious songs in praise to God with the accompaniment of an instrument, they do so. If it pleases them to have choirs and “praise teams” sing **for** them, they do so. If it pleases them to de-emphasize the Bible and emphasize man’s social problems, they do so. If it pleases them to ignore God’s criteria for worship and poll man to see what **type** of worship pleases him, they do so. An attitude that exchanges “a thus saith the Lord” for “this is what makes me happy” is what keeps people from understanding the Bible alike.

The Bible is God’s revelation, not man’s (2 Peter 1:21), and it contains His “*perfect will*” (Romans 12:2). All who have “*the perfect law of liberty*” (James 1:25) can understand the Bible alike. Jesus prayed “*that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee*” (John 17:21). Paul reminds all to “*speak the same thing*” and to be “*perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment*” (1 Corinthians 1:10).

Paul also commands the brethren at Rome to “*mark them that are causing the divisions and occasions of stumbling, contrary to the doctrine which ye learned: and turn away from them*” (Romans 16:17, ASV). Is it not true that one would have to **understand** that one is acting and teaching differently from what the Bible teaches in order to carry out this command?

The inspired Word that condemns religious division among believers further states that brethren are to “*contend earnestly for **the faith**, which was once for all delivered unto the saints*” (Jude 3, emphasis added). Our Lord delivered but “*one faith*,” also called “*the gospel*,” which He commanded to be preached to every person in the world (Hebrews 1:1-2; Ephesians 4:5; Mark 16:15-16). These truths no one can rightly deny!

What an indictment against God it is if one does not believe that all who so desire can understand the Bible alike! Think about it! If an all wise, all loving, and all powerful God does not give us a Book that we can all understand alike, it means that He did not want to do so; and such a view of God casts doubt on His goodness and mercy.

The Bible does not leave one wondering what God expects of Him. To the Ephesian brethren Paul said, “*Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is*” (Ephesians 5:17). Moses said to God’s people long ago regarding statutes and ordinances, “*Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people*” (Deuteronomy 4:6). Solomon said,

“The wisdom of the prudent is to understand his way: but the folly of fools is deceit” (Proverbs 14:8). It is no wonder that God commands us to “*buy the truth, and sell it not*”; as “*wisdom, and instruction, and understanding*” (Proverbs 23:23) come from the truth! The God that we are to worship and serve “*is not a God of confusion*” (1 Corinthians 14:33, ASV). The doctrines and commandments of men are what cause division and confusion – not the inspired Word of God!

To understand the Bible alike, people must not “bind” or “loose” where God has not “bound” or “loosed” (Matthew 16:19). One cannot “add to” or “take from” the commandments that God has given to His people (Deuteronomy 4:2; Revelation 22:18-19). One must teach and accept the “*whole counsel*” of God on every subject (Acts 20:27). Partial obedience to the will of God will not suffice. King Saul is a case in point as he boldly declared to Samuel, “*I have performed the commandment of Jehovah*” (1 Samuel 15:13). God’s prophet replied, “*What meaneth then this bleating of his sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear*” (1 Samuel 15:14)? God had said, “*Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass*” (1 Samuel 15:3). Samuel understood God, and so did King Saul – Saul simply elected to do his own thing, and many people today choose to do as did Saul.

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“ATTENTION... YOU ARE IN THE WRONG PLACE”

by Eddy Gilpin
(FCGN Editor, 1989-1991)

A few days ago I read a humorous story that brought to mind a thought. That story and that thought serve as the basis for this article.

As the story goes, it seems that this upscale department store had a practice of assigning one of its customer service representatives to make a public address announcement reminding shoppers to complete their shopping just prior to the store’s appointed closing time. One evening a woman who had recently worked at a K-Mart opened the announcement by saying, “Attention K-Mart shoppers. . . .” Quickly realizing her mistake, she added, “. . . you are in the wrong store.”

Wouldn’t it be nice if each time we found ourselves somewhere we shouldn’t be, such an announcement would be made? If we were doing something we ought not, or saying something that was not appropriate, or were with associates who were not good for us; would it not be helpful to hear someone say, “Attention, you are in the wrong place;” or, “Attention, you are with the wrong crowd;” or, “Attention, you are saying the wrong things?” Such reminders would be really helpful.

There are such warnings, though not in an audible fashion as was the case in the story. These warnings are found in the Word of God. They warn us against saying and doing the wrong things, being in the wrong places and with the wrong people. These warnings, like the imaginative announcement can be of great value to us. However, in order for them to assist us as they should, we must spend time in the

Word learning them. Remember, David said, *“Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee”* (Psalm 119:11). Paul said of Timothy, *“And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus”* (2 Timothy 3:15). God **does** offer us words of wisdom and warning concerning right and wrong. He does so through **His Word**. Our job is to fill our hearts with it so that when temptations come our way, we can have the wisdom to avoid them.

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GOD’S AUTHORIZED WORSHIP - COLOSSIANS 3:17

1. **LORD’S SUPPER** - The New Testament and early church history record that Christians met on the first day of every week (Sunday) to worship God and remember Christ (Acts 20:7; I Corinthians 11:23-34; 16: 1-2).
2. **PRAYERS** - (Acts 2:42; Philippians 4:6-7; I Thessalonians 5:17-18).
3. **SINGING** - God’s word authorizes only vocal music and specifically singing (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 2:12). The New Testament shows no use of mechanical instruments of music in worship to God by the church Christ established. Church history notes no such use for nearly 700 years after the New Testament was completed. It is an innovation of men, not of God.
4. **GIVING** - Free-willed, cheerful, generous, and every week (Acts 20:35; I Corinthians 16:1-2; 2 Corinthians 8 & 9).
5. **PREACHING OF THE WORD** - The gospel of Christ, not men’s doctrines nor entertainment, saves and strengthens us (Acts 2:42; 20:7; Romans 10:17; I Corinthians 1:18-23).

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